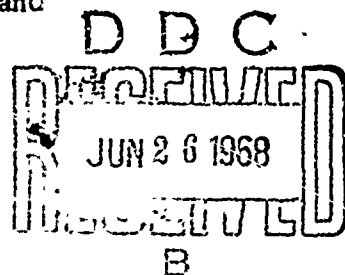


AD 620754

The Effect of Culture Training on Leadership,
Organizational Performance, and
Adjustment*

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Americans, whether as members of the armed forces, as officials, or as representatives of business, increasingly come into work contacts with members of other cultures. Many of these contacts require extended and close working relations, and very frequently, the success or failure of the entire mission depends on the way in which the individual is able to get along with his counterpart in the host culture. This is particularly true in traditional cultures which blur the distinctions between the personal and the business relationship. In many of these cultures, it is commonly assumed that "you can't trust a man in business unless you know and trust him as a person."

It has been clear for some time that it requires training and preparation to work successfully in another culture. A number of such training programs have been developed for this purpose. Some of them, like Foreign Service or Peace Corps training, require several months; others, such as those in some business organizations, involve orientation courses of several weeks. There is, however, also a need for the type of

*The work reported in this paper was conducted under ARPA Order 454, ONR Contract Nonr 1834(36) and in part under Contract DA-49-193-MD-2060 with the Office of the Surgeon General. The project is directed by Fred E. Fiedler and Harry C. Triandis, Department of Psychology, University of Illinois. Among the principal investigators have been M. M. Chemers, U. G. Foa (now at the University of Missouri), T. R. Mitchell, G. O'Brien, C. E. Osgood, L. M. Stolurow (now at Harvard University), and D. Summers.

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orientation which can be compressed into the space of a few hours. The need for such a program is particularly acute for the officer who suddenly finds himself en route to a foreign assignment, or for the government official or business executive who simply cannot spare the weeks or months to prepare himself for each and every culture within which he must perform effectively.

Our attempt to cope with this problem has been the development of a culture training program which can provide the individual some familiarity with the host culture within the space of hours--if necessary on the plane to his destination.

We began our work in 1960 under contract with the Office of Naval Research, and later with funds of the Advanced Projects Agency. The project was conceived as an integrated series of investigations consisting of three interlocking phases:

a. The identification of culturally critical concepts and behaviors--that is, between the host culture and the American culture, differences in the meaning of words, ideas, customs, and unspoken assumptions.

b. The development of a self-instructional manual of programmed material, a "Culture Assimilator," which would enable the individual to understand critical cultural differences and to respond to them appropriately in a work context.

c. Laboratory and field studies to determine the effect of the programmed instruction in improving the performance in different tasks and under different leadership conditions.

Identification of culturally critical concepts and behaviors. This aspect of our program has been the primary responsibility of Harry C. Triandis.

The basic aim of the subproject has been the development of a theory of "subjective culture," that is, the characteristic ways in which a cultural group perceives and responds to its social environment.* Triandis and his coworkers have developed a series of methods for eliciting important differences between cultures. One of the methods permits the determination of differences in behaviors which are appropriate for persons occupying specific roles in each culture. For example, in Eastern countries, college educated men do not perform manual labor. Hence, an engineer who troubleshoots a machine lowers himself to the status of the workman, and loses the respect of his peers and of his subordinates. And the worker sees his supervisor as someone who gets paid for his skill and knowledge. Hence, if a supervisor asks a workman for his opinion, "it shows" that the supervisor does not know as much as he should, and it may seem to the worker that he is being imposed upon by having to do his boss's job.

Likewise, concepts have different meanings and implications. For example, when Americans are asked the typical consequence of "love," they respond with such terms as "marriage" or "happiness." When Greeks were asked about the consequences of love, a substantial number responded with the word "death." This answer reflects the Greek folk custom which requires

*Osgood, C.E. Speculation on the structure of interpersonal intentions. ONR Technical Report No. 39, Group Effectiveness Research Laboratory, 1966.

Triandis, H.C., Vassiliou, V., and Nassiakou, M. Some cross-cultural studies of subjective culture. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology Monographs, in press.

Triandis, H.C., Vassiliou, V., and Nassiakou, M. Some cultural differences in the perception of social behavior. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology Monographs, in press.

Triandis, H.D. and Vassiliou, V. A comparative analysis of subjective culture. ONR Technical Report No. 55, Group Effectiveness Research Laboratory, 1967.

the brother to kill a sister who has become involved in an illicit love affair and who has, thus, dishonored the family. Less dramatic cultural differences, which may, however, be more important in work relations, have been found in a surprisingly large number of concepts.

The "Culture Assimilator." Data obtained with the above mentioned instruments have guided the theory and construction of the Culture Assimilators. The specific content of the programs is based on "critical incidents" reported by individuals who have been involved in intercultural situations.* The respondents are asked to describe some occurrences which markedly changed their perception and understanding, or their attitude toward, the host culture. The incidents are then written as an inter-related series of episodes, each with four alternative responses and appropriate feedback based on anthropological data as well as our findings about subjective culture.

The idea for the construction of these Culture Assimilators originated with Professor L. M. Stolurow, our previous co-investigator, now at Harvard University. The programs were originally intended to be prepared for computer-based instruction. The current versions are, however, written in book form which makes them easy to handle and to ship. A Culture Assimilator consists, typically of 70 to 100 "items," each containing (a) an episode which briefly describes an intercultural encounter, (b) four alternative answers, and (c) four statements, indicating the correctness of the answer, an explanation of the cultural basis for the correct answer, and further instructions to the trainee. The entire program

*Stolurow, L.M. and Santhai, Suthita (with assistance of Koopman, R). Critical incidents with heterocultural interactions. ONR Technical Report No. 42, Group Effectiveness Research Laboratory, 1966.

requires approximately four to six hours of the trainee's time. Culture Assimilators have now been prepared for Thailand, the Arab countries, Iran, Central America, and a program for Greece is in preparation. An example of an item from the Iran Assimilator, developed by M. Chemers, is shown in the illustration.

SAMPLE ITEM FROM THE IRAN CULTURE ASSIMILATOR

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An American Peace Corpsman was working as an agricultural advisor in a small Iranian village. He often felt confused by the behavior of the villagers. At times a villager would ask for some advice on a certain technique. After thoughtful consideration, the Corpsman would give his opinion only to find later that it was ignored. In one particular instance, a peasant named Fereydoun, who owned a small piece of land, asked for some advice on plowing methods. The Corpsman was not sure of his answer and wanted to consult a few manuals, so he told Fereydoun to come to his office the next morning, and he would tell him what to do. However, the next morning Fereydoun did not come, and when the Corpsman sought him out, he found that Fereydoun had already started the plowing his own way.

Alternatives

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What do you think is the best explanation for Fereydoun's actions?

A. When the Peace Corpsman said he was not sure of the plowing method, Fereydoun dismissed him as a valuable source of information.

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B. Fereydoun was offended by being asked to come to the Corpsman's office and felt that the Corpsman should come to his farm.

Go to page 101

C. The average Iranian is very impatient, even with short delays, and Fereydoun wanted to begin his plowing.

Go to page 102

D. Iranian peasants believe that traditional ways are the only ways and will not listen to any advice.

Go to page 103

You chose A: When the Peace Corpsman said he was not sure of the plowing method, Fereydoun dismissed him as any valuable source of information.

Correct. Very good! This was a subtle problem, but a very important one for anyone who lives or works in Iran. Since the Peace Corpsman was sent as an expert advisor, in the eyes of his subordinates, the village peasants, he is expected to know everything about his field. Any hesitation or delay to seek further knowledge is taken as a sign of weakness and lack of knowledge. Thus, a person who has no special knowledge need not be listened to. A more successful method for the Peace Corpsman might have been to provide a tentative answer which would have occupied the villager until the Corpsman could be sure of the definitely correct procedure. Indeed, his hesitation with other peasants, in an effort to give the best possible answer, may have been interpreted by them as uncertainty, and thus the advice ignored.

Go on to the next passage on page 104

You chose B: Fereydoun was offended by being asked to come to the Corpsman's office and felt that the Corpsman should come to his farm.

Incorrect. In the evaluation of this alternative you should draw on your knowledge of the importance of status and role in such a situation. Since the Peace Corpsman is, in essence, a resident expert, his status would be higher than that of a peasant. Furthermore, the peasant was seeking a favor in the form of advice. Considering both of these facts, it would not be at all likely that Fereydoun was offended by the request, but rather that he considered it quite natural.

Reread the passage on page 98, and make another choice.

You chose C: The average Iranian is very impatient, even with short delays, and Fereydoun wanted to begin his plowing.

Incorrect. You have made the common error of attributing American characteristics to the Iranian. In fact, the average Iranian is not greatly concerned with time and rigid schedules and is not usually impatient over a short delay. There is another, more important factor which accounts for Fereydoun's actions.

Reread the passage on page 98, and make another choice.

You chose D: Iranian peasants believe that traditional ways are the only ways and will not listen to any advice.

Incorrect. Although this answer seems possible at first glance, it is not completely accurate. While it is true that in most countries, the peasants are quite traditional and have a tendency to cling to the old ways, other factors must be taken into account.

Agricultural advisors have generally been fairly well received by the Iranian peasants and their ideas put to use when feasible. Furthermore, the passage relates that Fereydown asked for the Peace Corpsman's help, and probably, really wished to use it.

Reread the passage on page 98, and make another choice.

Validation. We have considered the construction of Culture Assimilators a problem in basic as well as applied research. This involves not only the development of a theory of subjective culture, as well as the principles underlying the transmission of subjective culture, but also questions concerning the utilization of this material in task situations. The development of these teaching programs has, therefore, been closely integrated in research on leadership and organizational performance. We conducted a number of laboratory experiments, comparing trained and untrained Americans who were teamed up with students from various foreign countries. In addition, we have now conducted one field experiment in Iran*, and two field studies in Central America.** Our findings show that the culture trained leaders tended to develop more effective interpersonal relations than did untrained leaders or those trained with culturally irrelevant control materials. Moreover, culture assimilator training, even though it was in some cases embedded in other culture training programs, materially contributed to the adjustment and performance of Americans working with members of the indigenous populations.

For example, in a field study in Central America we assisted in the training of teenage volunteers who performed public health services in isolated villages. Measures of personal adjustment were obtained during,

*Chemers, M.M. The effects of training on interpersonal bargaining as a function of situational variables. Paper presented at the Midwestern Psychological Association in Chicago, May, 1968.

**Fiedler, F.E., O'Brien, G.E., and Ilgen, D. The effect of leadership style upon performance and adjustment in volunteer teams operating in a stressful foreign environment. Urbana, Ill.: Group Effectiveness Research Laboratory, University of Illinois, 1967.

and after, the overseas experience. Individuals who had received culture training reported themselves happier, under less stress, and generally healthier and better adjusted than did untrained volunteers.

Figure 1 shows scores obtained from daily reports and from self-esteem questionnaires obtained early and later in the overseas experience. Moreover, teams consisting of culture trained individuals were rated as having performed more effectively, especially in community development work and in interactions requiring cooperation with villagers. (See Figure 2)

Considerable further research remains to be done. We are now hoping to extend our research to the Armed Forces and government agencies working overseas to learn more about the type of culture training required in various situations, and the methods for providing this training more effectively.

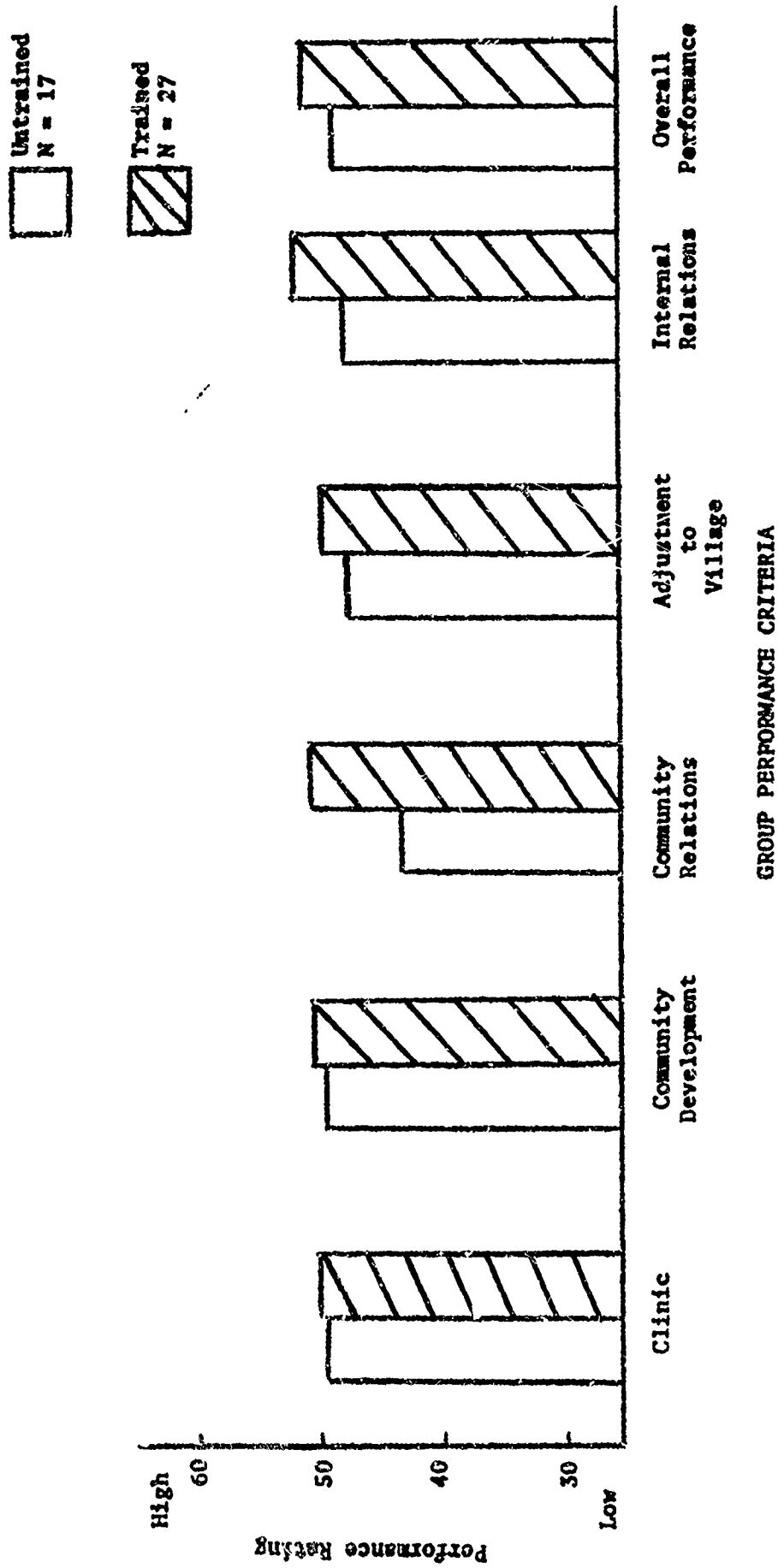


Figure 1. Ratings by supervisors and headquarters staff of the performance of culture trained and untrained teams on different aspects of their mission.

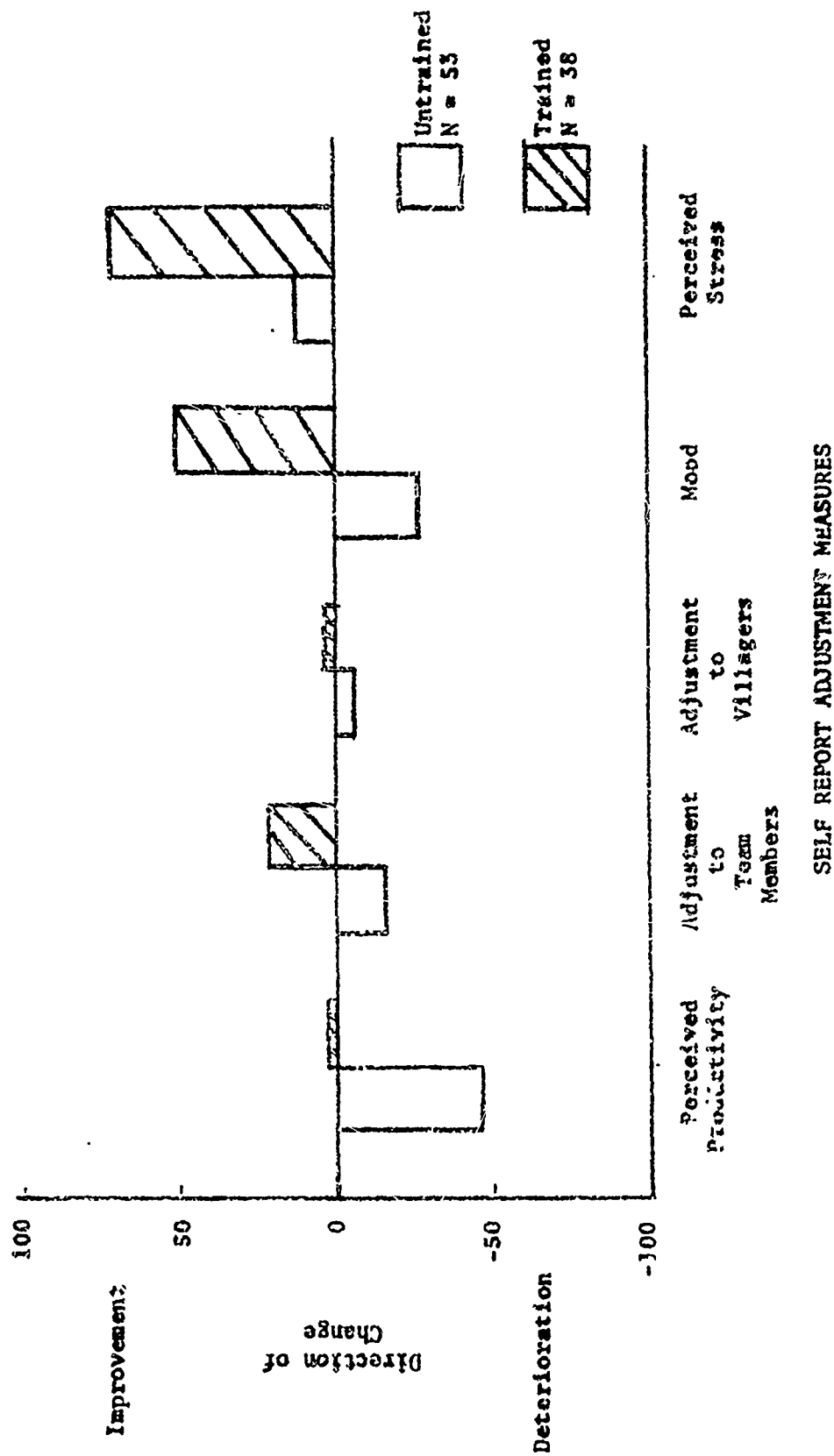


Figure 2. Change in personal adjustment scores obtained by means of daily team member reports during the first and last week of the project overseas.

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